I remember two such cases well—the case of the armed revolt in Gorlovka in 1905, and the case of the 103 Anarchists. Although very different in origin and outcome, these cases were characteristic of the state of Tsarist justice at the time when I had the rare opportunity to observe and study its operation from inside one of the grimmest prisons of the Empire.

THE CASE OF THE ARMED REVOLT IN GORLOVKA

The Ekaterinoslav courts served as a central slaughterhouse of south Russia and tried cases arising from numberless local riots. That of the armed upheaval in Gorlovka included the strike on railroads and in coal mines in the Donetz Basin, local riots, the disarming of railroad-station gendarmes, and the erection of barricades in some villages.

The charges were focused on events in a small mining town, Gorlovka, where the miners had held a meeting and decided to resist the approaching troops. Defense commandos were formed, some of them armed with crossbars and pistols. Their clash with the troops did not materialize, however, since the officer in command of the troops sent against the town stopped his train a few miles from Gorlovka, unloaded his men, and presented an ultimatum to the miners. The crowd dispersed and the station was cleared without a shot. A few ringleaders were arrested and the affair seemed to be forgotten. Later, however, as the grip of reaction tightened, more people were arrested in and around Gorlovka and all revolutionary events hundreds of miles away from this town were pulled together into a mass trial with 132 defendants. In 1909 the prosecution demanded death sentences for all of them, and the president of the court told a defense attorney, "Half these scoundrels will hang!"

Most of the defendants had been carried along by the storm of 1905, as were millions of workers, peasants, and intellectuals. Their lawyers suggested an appeal to the Tsar for mercy in advance of the trial. The majority accepted this advice; one third rejected it. The administration segregated the "patriots" from the "rebels" in the prison and on the benches in the courtroom. Then, following the superintendent's advice, the "patriots" organized a church chorus. On December 6, 1909, the Tsar's birthday, they sent a telegram to the Tsar with best wishes for his happiness and a plea for mercy. The same day the Gorlovka chorus made its first appearance in the prison church.